

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY GABORONE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 095294

E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: ELTIN, ESTC, PFOR, MZ, RH, SF

SUBJECT:RHODESIAS RAIL LINKS WITH SOUTH AFRICA

FOLLOWING IS A REPEAT OF STATE 567641, QUOTE:

1. DEPARTMENT WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY'S ASSESSMENT SOONEST ON CAPABILITY OF RHODESIAN-SOUTH AFRICAN RAIL NETWORK AND SOUTH AFRICAN PORTS TO HANDLE RHODESIAN CARGO DIVERTED FROM MOZAMBIQUE AS WELL AS EMBASSY'S VIEW ON WILLINGNESS OF SAG TO BAIL OUT RHODESIA EVEN IF RAIL AND PORT INFRASTRUCTURE COULD HANDLE ADDITIONAL LOAD. FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS CONTAIN RESUME OF INFORMATION CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO DEPARTMENT. ANY COMMENTS ON THE ACCURACY OF THIS MATERIAL WOULD BE APPRECIATED.

2. VARIOUS REPORTS (FINANCIAL MAIL 5/23/75 AND ECONOMIST INTELLIGENCE UNIT QUARTERLY ECONOMIC REVIEW - RHODESIA AND MALAWI NOS 3 AND 4, 1975) OVER PAST 12 MONTHS HAVE INDICATED THAT RHODESIANS WERE STRENGTHENING RUTUNGA-BEIT BRIDGE RAIL CONNECTION AND BUILDING MORE TURN-OUTS IN ORDER TO ENABLE LINE TO HANDLE UP TO 12,000 TONS OF TRAFFIC DAILY, WHICH WOULD BE SUFFICIENT TO TAKE CARE OF ALL OR VIRTUALLY ALL OF RHODESIA'S CURRENT EXPORTS AND

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IMPORTS. FINANCIAL MAIL ARTICLE PREDICTED THAT WITH

CONCERTED EFFORT, THESE IMPROVEMENTS COULD HAVE BEEN COMPLETED WITHIN SIX MONTHS (I.E. BY NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1975).

3. REPORTEDLY OVER 40-50 PERCENT OF RHODESIAN FOREIGN TRADE WAS PASSING THROUGH MOZAMBICAN PORTS AT TIME OF BORDER CLOSING. HOWEVER, WHETHER THESE FIGURES CONCERN TONNAGE OR VALUE IS NOT CLEAR. REPORTS RECEIVED BY DEPARTMENT IN CONNECTION WITH BYRD AMENDMENT SHIPMENTS SHOW THAT INCREASING AMOUNTS OF COMMODITIES EXCEPT CHROME ORE WERE BEING SHIPPED THROUGH DURBAN AND PORT ELIZABETH. REFTEL AND NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS INDICATE ONLY BULK ORES, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND SOME FERROCHROME CONTINUED TO PASS THROUGH MOZAMBIQUE PORTS AT THE TIME OF THE CLOSURE. IT HAS ALSO BEEN REPORTED THAT ALMOST ALL OF RHODESIAN IMPORTS WERE PASSING THROUGH SOUTH AFRICA.

4. IT HAS BEEN NOTED THAT SOUTH AFRICAN PORTS ARE CURRENTLY OPERATING AT NEAR CAPACITY BUT WITHOUT SERIOUS BACKUPS. PRESUMABLY, PRESENT OPERATIONS ALREADY INVOLVE HANDLING 50 PERCENT OR MORE OF RHODESIAN'S FOREIGN TRADE. HOWEVER, IN LIGHT OF CHROME ORE SHIPMENT PROBLEMS LAST SPRING, SOUTH AFRICAN BULK HANDLING FACILITIES MAY BE INADEQUATE TO HANDLE THE LARGE AMOUNTS OF RHODESIAN ORE AND GRAIN WHICH WERE TRANSITING MOZAMBIQUE.

5. CENTRAL TO WHOLE ISSUE APPEARS TO BE EXTENT OF SAG WILLINGNESS TO BE IDENTIFIED AS CONDUIT OF RHODESIAN FOREIGN TRADE. UNQUOTE. ROBINSON

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